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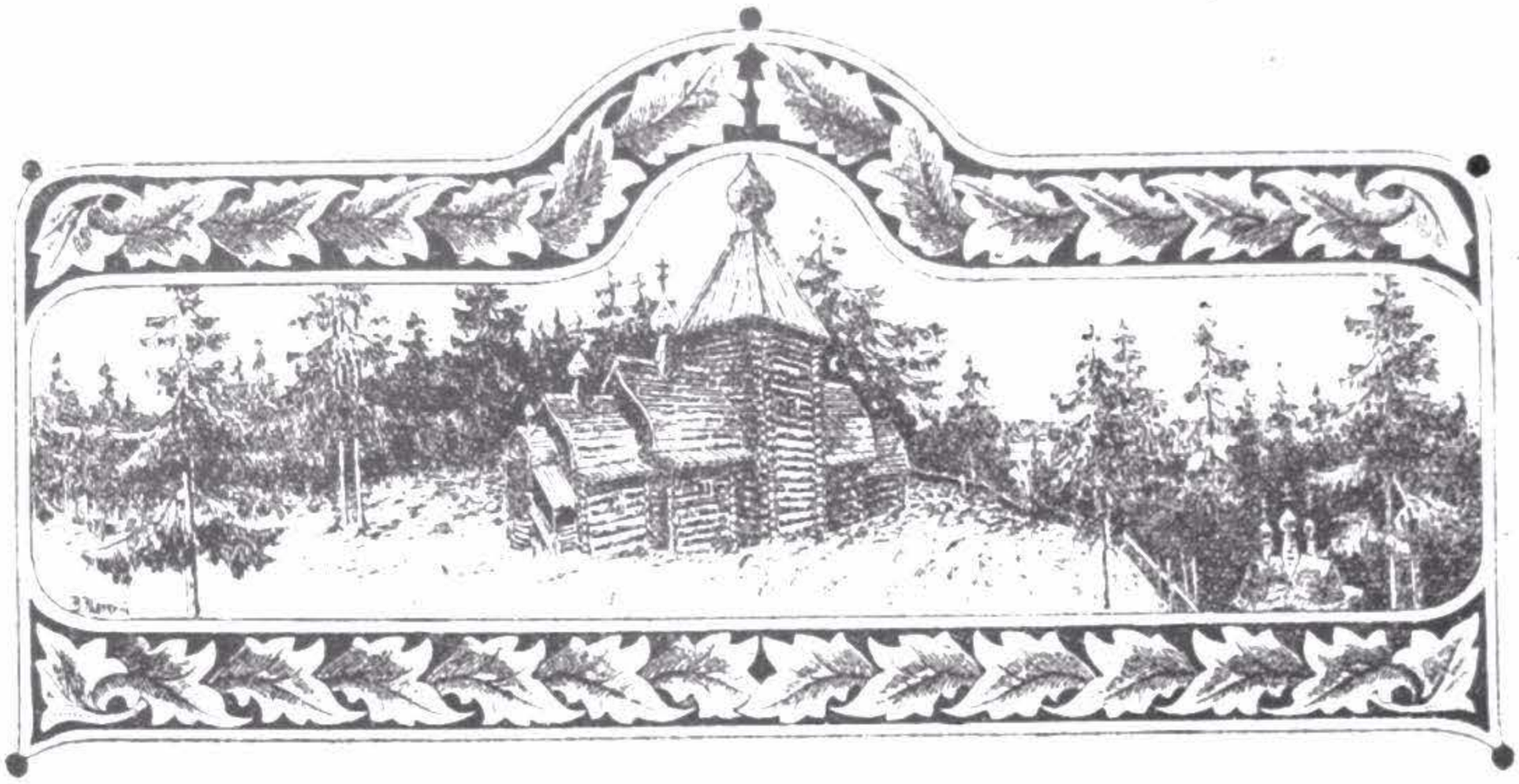


Holy Women of The Northern Thebaid

LET WOMEN KEEP SILENCE IN THE CHURCHES.
I Cor. 14:34

AWAY FROM THE TUMULT and noise of the world, in quiet monastic refuges, in deserted landscapes which evoke thoughts of eternity, women of Holy Russia worked out their salvation for a thousand years, striving to acquire first of all humility of wisdom.

The spiritual fragrance of this key virtue in Patristic Orthodoxy, that of HUMILITY OF WISDOM, which is the joining together of humility and wisdom, has always been very close to true Orthodox women, and especially to the women Saints. Behind them there always shines forth the humble image of Her Who is the first Abbess of all monastics, the Most Holy Theotokos.

Particularly is this true of the women Saints of Holy Russia, who were so penetrated by this quiet, refined, and pure virtue that only very meager information has even come down to us about them. They strove to be unseen, unnoticed, concealed in quiet monastic cells behind monastery walls, located beyond distant lakes and rivers, in forgotten sketes hidden in green thickets, in the shadow of weeping willows and birch groves, which alone heard their quiet prayer and soft chanting and saw them beholding the bridal chamber of their Divine Bridegroom, Christ.

The number of women Saints known by the Church on earth falls far short of the number of men Saints, and there has come down to us a surprisingly small number of their Lives, many of which are brief and rather general. This does not, however, mean that their numbers were really so few or that they did not attain the spiritual heights of men — but only emphasizes the surpassing beauty of their other-worldly humility and silence (hesychia).

The Orthodox women Saints, unlike Martha, sit at the feet of the Lord and pay heed to the words of Christ: *Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her* (Luke 10:42) — and they *keep silence in the churches* (I Cor. 14:34).

THE VERY BEGINNING of Christianity in Russia occurred through a holy woman, *St. Olga, Equal to the Apostles* (†969, July 11), whose grandson, *St. Vladimir* (†1015, July 15) baptized his Kievan princedom in 988 and gave the whole of Russia the Orthodox Christian Faith at the very time when Byzantium had reached its highest point in all phases of spiritual culture. By this time all the basic heresies had been identified and uprooted by the Seven Ecumenical Councils, and monasticism was in full bloom. Thus, Russia from the very beginning was entrusted with the fullness of the *pure Faith, Orthodoxy,* and she treasured it throughout the ages as the supreme heritage in her hierarchy of values, herself thereby becoming, in the activities and hopes of her best sons and daughters, *Holy Russia,* the guardian of Orthodoxy. Such she has remained until this very day, even while in bonds and in the catacombs under the Communist Yoke.

Monasticism immediately captured the Russian soul and was practiced in Kievan Russia in monasteries and convents built by princes and noblemen. It flourished predominantly in the Kiev Caves, which began with a spark brought to Russia from Mt. Athos by St. Anthony. Monasteries both for men and women began to spring up in various places, being founded chiefly by princes, who saw them as treasuries of sanctity for their principality, but also by hierarchs, by monks, and by righteous women — some even being founded by women for men, as in the case of *St. Euphrosyne of Polotsk,* that great pilgrim-lover of Byzantium and the Holy Land, where she reposed in the Lavra of her beloved St. Theodosius the Cœnobiarch, her relics being later translated to the Kiev Caves.

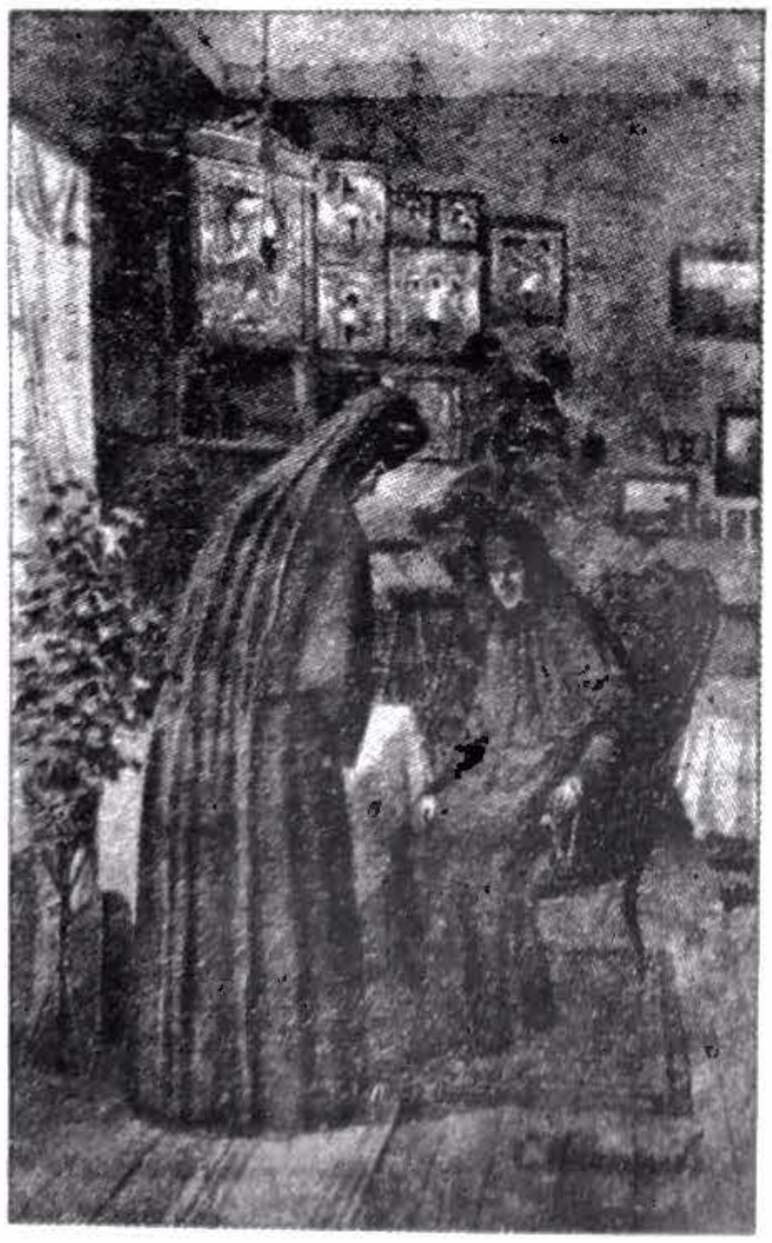
The coming of the Tatar barbarians, who demolished Kiev, burning and destroying on their way all the monasteries and killing their inhabitants, did not cut off the growth of monastic communities. On the contrary, the

SYNAXIS OF THE WOMEN SAINTS OF HOLY RUSSIA

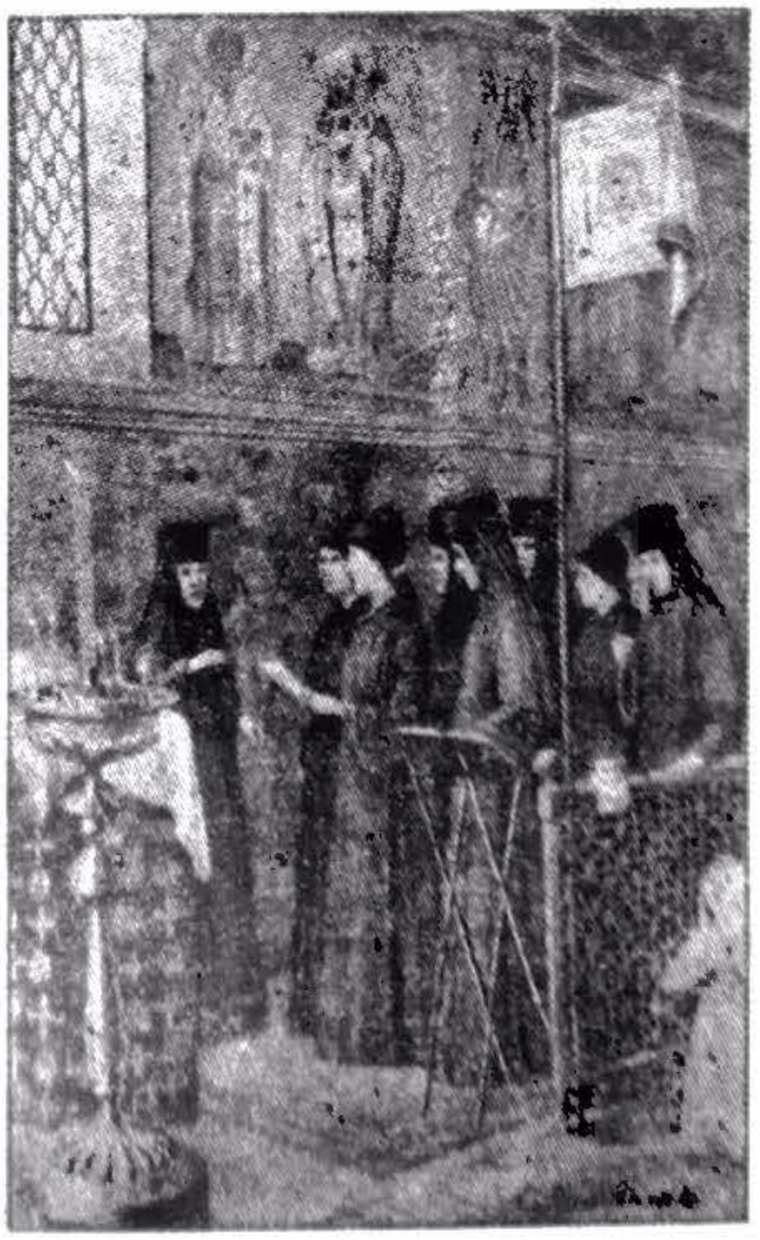
A Skete Typical of the Women's Sketes of Nothern Russia -
Protection Skete, Bluffton, Canada

Royal Nun Martha,
Mother of Tsar Michael Romanov

The Suzdal Protection Convent of
St. Euthymius, with the Saint's Own
Monastery Visible in the Distance (right)



A Typical Nun's Cell with Icon-
ostasis in a Well-to-do Monastery



Nun and Novices Singing Antiph-
onally on the Right Cliros

ILLUSTRATIONS OF ORTHODOX CONVENT LIFE

number of communities increased. The astonishing impulse for the foundation of new monasteries, which now moved northward, was as it were an answer to the question of how to retain the Orthodox philosophy of life. In addition to providing a harmonious and economically independent communal life, these monasteries, which formed an Orthodox mentality in the full spirit of the Church, opened up a mystical realm of spiritual perfection which transfigured earthly men, women and children into Angel-like beings. This inspired the newly-enlightened Russian people, and a whole network of monastic citadels sprang up around Novgorod, Pskov, Suzdal and, of course, Moscow, which, after the fall of the Second Rome — Constantinople — became the Third Rome. Great Saints founded monasteries in this period: *St. Anna of Novgorod* (†1050, Oct. 4); three Pskov Abbesses: *Eupraxia* (†1243, May 8), *Martha* (†1300, Nov. 8) and *Bassa* (†1473, March 19); *St. Charitina, Abbess of Novgorod* (†1281, Oct. 5); *St. Eudocia of Moscow* (†1407, July 7), foundress of two convents; and many others in Moscow, both canonized and uncanonized.

Monastic communities of virgins in Holy Russia were greatly esteemed and honored — and not only as places where princes would put their wives away when they wished to get rid of them. The women's monasteries were always thought of as holy places, havens for ascetic labor, with a life centered about the cycle of beautiful and all-encompassing church services, for which refined liturgical arts were developed. The use of convents as hospitals, orphanages, schools, and workshops was always secondary, when it appeared at all. The ancient Byzantine models of asceticism, which were constantly present through the reading of the Synaxaria, the Prologue, and the Lives of Saints, were the main source of monastic inspiration and it was here that the heart of the women of Holy Russia lay.

It is wrong to say,* simply because no striking Lives of such women Saints have come down to us, that women in ancient Russia did not follow the severe anchoretic, hesychast practices of the desert-dwellers of old. There is sufficient indication in the sources that remain that there were indeed such heroines, who waged no less fierce battles with the prince of this world than the great holy men whose Lives are well known to us. The Lives of women anchorites in later centuries—such as *Abbess Eupraxia of Old Ladoga* (†1823, Sept. 23) and *Blessed Mary the Cave-digger of the White Mountains* (†1822, June 22) — show clearly what was in the hearts of women Saints in that

* As does Fedotov, and also T. Manukhina in *St. Anna of Kashin*, YMCA Press, Paris, 1954 (in Russian).

earlier time when the whole of Russian society marvelled at the anchoretic fervor of the dwellers of the unknown northern wilds.

The monastic movement of the holy women of Russia, to be sure, took forms that were somewhat different from those of the holy men of the North. It was the men who — in the steps of St. Sergius of Radonezh — were fearless "pioneers" of the northern forests, braving the untrodden territories of Russia with their constant dangers from wild animals, roaming Tatars and robbers, and the sheer physical hardships of establishing a monastic settlement in an uninhabited forest. The great desert-dwellers, after founding a monastic community, would usually move northward to find a new solitary desert, followed by their disciples, and often their disciples themselves would leave the original monastery to found their own communities. Women desert-lovers would then settle near the village which had grown up around the monastery, or in the monastery buildings themselves, if they had been deserted by the monks; thus they would have the protection of an established place already carved out of the wilderness and surrounded by a fence or wall. Here the women desert-dwellers would continue the founder's rule and tradition. Often it would be little-known women ascetics who would hand down the only information we have about some Saint. Thus, when the relics of *St. Cyril of Velsk* (†15th century, June 9) were discovered incorrupt, it was a certain *Righteous Nun Aquilina Nakapa* (†1517) who gave information about the unknown Saint, having herself received a miraculous healing from him, as had the *Righteous Eulampia*; and so the story of St. Cyril was handed down to us — but nothing more is known of the Blessed Aquilina and her monastic tradition.

Another kind of desert-loving holy woman is to be found in ancient Russia in a place which might easily be overlooked today when Orthodox society has become so worldly and the fundamentals of Orthodox upbringing have been largely forgotten. The primary duty which the Church lays upon woman is not merely the rearing of children, but, more importantly, the *breathing into them* of the sacred fragrance of *humility and meekness of heart*, which seals the spiritual bond between Christ and the child from infancy onward. This is no easy task, and never was. It is to this task that the spiritual energy of desert-loving women went in ancient Russia. Thus it is that many great Saints of the Northern Thebaid had great Saints for their mothers. The love for the life of paradise in the wilderness, and the spiritual strength that comes from a humble heart capable of enduring the hardships of the desert, were first given to the ascetics of the North during the guilelessness of childhood by their angel-like mothers, who, being unable to go to the northern desert themselves by reason of their worldly obligations, raised up sons fit to be desert-dwellers.

The mother of St. Sergius of Radonezh was *St. Maria, nun of Khotkov* (†1337); of St. Alexander of Svir, *St. Barbara, nun of Oyat* (†1500); of St. Macarius of Kolyazin, *St. Irene of Kozhin* (†15th century, June 1); of St. Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow and monk of Solovki, *St. Barsanuphia, schema-nun of Moscow*; the mothers of the fools for Christ of the North, Sts. Nicholas Kochanov and John of Ustiug, were the *Righteous Juliana* (†1384, Dec. 21) and *Abbess Natalia*; and there were others. The sister of St. Artemius of Verkola was the blessed *Parascheva of Pirimin*, venerated locally as a Saint. The widely-venerated *St. Juliana of Murom* (†1604), Jan. 2), who raised many children and grandchildren, was a desert-dweller at heart.

THE MONASTIC EXODUS into the Northern Thebaid, although unintentionally it resulted in the colonization of the forest wilds, was first of all an enormous movement of individuals who sought solely to acquire Christian perfection and other-worldliness. It was the fruit of a deeply-rooted Orthodox world view, according to which fallen human nature was to be governed by the love of Truth, by means of a definite Patristic standard: non-acquisitiveness, the mental activity of the Jesus Prayer, Hesychasm. This produced such a flowering of genuine Orthodox sanctity in men and women that even children, caught up in the ascetic fervor, reached the spiritual states of men of mature years and worked miracles after their death. The child-Saints of the North include *St. Artemius of Verkola* (†1545, June 23), *Sts. James* and his brother *John of Munezh* (†1570, June 24), *St. Glyceria* the young girl *of Novgorod* (†1522, May 13), and *St. John of Ustiug* (†1494, May 29), the fool for Christ who died at 18, having already achieved a height of Christian perfection.

Of all the hundreds of new monasteries which were founded each century in the vastness of the Northern Thebaid, at least a fourth were convents, some of them remaining small sketes with just a few virgins, others becoming much larger. Considering all the dangers of the uninhabited, almost impenetrable marshland of intertwining lakes and rivers, and also the sparseness of Orthodox habitation in these vast areas during the 14th to 17th centuries, it is indeed amazing what great fervor and zeal the women of Holy Russia manifested in following the anchoretic path of the ancient Saints of the Thebaid. Who can tell the full story of their spiritual heights? Who can enumerate their struggles, especially today when the very principles of True Orthodoxy are rapidly disappearing from the face of the earth?

The great Saints of the Thebaid, *Anthony* and *Pachomius*, and the great Orthodox Father of the West, *St. Benedict of Nursia*, founded monastic communities for women and placed their sisters in charge of them. So, in Russia,

the great *St. Euthymius of Suzdal*, being in close contact with St. Sergius of Radonezh and St. Alexis of Moscow, even being called "the second Sergius," founded in 1364 a coenobitic convent, just like St. Pachomius', across the river from his monastery, entrusting its care to his niece. He directed his convent according to a special monastic rule which he had from his elder the cave-dweller of Nizhni-Novgorod, *St. Dionysius* (later Archbishop) *of Suzdal* (†1385, Oct. 15), who was in the full tradition of Byzantine spirituality and twice travelled to Greece.

This same holy monk, St. Dionysius, blessed his spiritual daughter *St. Theodora of Nizhni-Novgorod* (†1375, April 16) to found a coenobitic convent in the latter city, and later tonsured her in it. In her we see the first clear example of a severe female ascetic Saint of the pure Byzantine tradition in the North.

ONE OF THE GREATEST FATHERS of the Northern Thebaid was *St. Dionysius of Glushitsa* (†1437, June 1). Through him the spirit of Mt. Athos — that is to say, of traditional Byzantine spirituality — went deep into the North and entered the women's convents. Earlier direct contacts with Mt. Athos had been maintained throughout the centuries, beginning with the Kievan St. Anthony, but St. Dionysius is the first one known to us to establish a convent with an Athonite typicon. A native of Vologda, St. Dionysius was tonsured in the Spasso-Kameni Island Monastery by its Abbot, *Blessed Dionysius* (†1425, Oct. 18), who out of special love gave his disciple his own name. Having received hesychast training for many years in this monastery, which had an Athonite typicon, and feeling the need for silence, St. Dionysius went deep into the forest wilds of Vologda and there, near the wild river Glushitsa, began his anchoretic life. Soon he was followed not only by monks, but also by God-thirsting women, for whom he established a convent on a nearby hill and dedicated the community to St. Leontius of Rostov, since he had just returned from Rostov, where he received the blessing and instruction of his elder Dionysius, now Bishop of Rostov. This convent with its Athonite spirit flourished and spread the desert-dwelling ideal for women far and wide.

St. Dionysius was also an outstanding icon-painter, and it is known that he adorned the convent with his icons. One of them, a wonder-working icon of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, was given to the Monastery of the Seven Hills located on the same river, which had been founded by the Saint's disciples. When this monastery became deserted after a plague, the Most Holy Mother of God appeared in a dream to a righteous nun in a Moscow convent, *Juliana of the Belozersk family*, who had lain paralyzed for three years,

St. Dionysius of Glushitsa
and a Typical Convent of the Russian North

promising her healing if she would go to the Seven Hills Monastery and rebuild the church there. This the Blessed Juliana promised, was miraculously healed, and went north and found the deserted monastery and the wondrous icon painted by St. Dionysius. In the midst of the total desolation, she built herself a tiny cell next to the church and thus refounded the convent, which existed for many centuries and became a seedbed of the spiritual tradition received through St. Dionysius. Later another Saint shone forth here: the *Blessed Nun Mariamna* (†1643).

Other convents became renowned in the Northern Thebaid. In the vicinity of the *St. Cyril of White Lake Monastery*, following the tradition of this Saint, a convent was founded at Goritsy on a river bank by the noblewoman *Eudocia* in 1544; it became a Lavra for women in the North where many holy and renowned women worked out their salvation right up to Soviet times.

In *Vologda*, the *Holy Nun Domnicia* founded in 1560 the famous Dormition Convent, where a stone church was dedicated to St. Sergius of Radonezh, the Abba of the North.

In the *Kargopol territory*, a Dormition Convent was founded in 1592 by *St. John the Hairy*, who was "a laborer of the monastery of virgins," as the ancient chronicles describe him; he later received the schema with the name of Jonah and was buried in the convent.

In *Solvychegodsk*, the *Holy Virgin Juliana*, refusing to accede to the unclean desire of a pagan, was drowned in the river, where the Ulianovsky convent was soon built, with her as its patron.

In the Arctic territory of *Archangelsk*, a Holy Trinity Convent was founded in 1604. In 1664 the *Righteous Abbess Martha*, who was known personally by Tsar Alexis Michailovich Romanov, turned it into a blossoming monastic citadel for women in the utmost North.

In *Old Ladoga* near Valaam, the renowned Dormition Convent existed from the 15th century. After being destroyed by the Swedes, it was rebuilt in 1617 and became one of northern Russia's most important contemplative centers, where later there shone forth the great *Abbess Eupraxia*, spiritual converser with Sts. Sergius and Herman of Valaam and St. Alexander of Svir.

SPIRITUALLY ORIENTED WOMEN would never plunge into the wilds absolutely alone, but would always approach the monastic calling with the sole purpose of saving their soul with caution, self-distrust, and meekness. They would settle by twos and threes in humble abodes, often abandoned cabins, in forlorn areas, near churches on the outskirts of town, or near cemeteries. They would provide themselves with God-pleasing deeds: reading the Psalter over the dead, baking prosphora, painting icons, making candles, or mending; they would remain in silence while one sister would read soul-profiting texts from the Lives of Saints or the Holy Fathers, or they would chant canons, akathists, or "psalms" (religious songs), shedding tears of contrition and repentance. Their common sharing of the basic necessities of life would give them spiritual growth and strength, providing an active experience in sobriety of life, something especially essential for those who might be called by God for a life of seclusion after years of trials and sufferings.

Their cells would consist of a one-room cabin with anterooms. It would have an iconostasis or icon-corner, before which vigil lamps would be burning at all times, and an analogion with all the books necessary for the indispensable reading of the daily cycle of services. There would be the smell of incense and home-made bread, a hooked runner rug, flowerpots on the wide window sills, neatness, and a reigning quietness — all this would add to the warmth of a typical cell of the "God-workers." Here the all-night vigils would frequently be conducted, and a devout, God-fearing eldress would console suffering hearts with words of contrition, softer than oil.

The whole touching atmosphere of these "workers for God" spoke of deep warmth, simplicity, and inward tranquility and peace with God and His transfigured world. This was the most popular and beloved way in which living Orthodox piety was disseminated among the people throughout Russia. This way of life has withstood all historical temptations. The "babushkas" of today, who have saved Orthodox piety from the Communists, still get their leaven from this heart of Holy Russia.

(*To be continued.*)

Two Excerpts from a New Book

OF THE ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA BROTHERHOOD

Preface

WHAT ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN is not exalted in heart and mind at the thought of the Egyptian Thebaid — the place of struggle of the great St. Anthony, first among monastic Fathers and model of the anchoretic life; of St. Pachomius the coenobiarch, who received the monastic rule of the common life from an Angel; and of the thousands of monks and nuns who followed them and made the desert a city peopled with Christians striving towards the heavens in the Angelic way of life?

Few, however, are those who know of Orthodoxy's *Northern* Thebaid — the Russian "desert" of the forested, marshy North — where no fewer thousands of monks and nuns sought out their salvation in the footsteps of the great monastic Fathers of more recent times: St. Sergius of Radonezh, St. Cyril of White Lake, St. Nilus of Sora, and hundreds of others whose names have been entered in the Calendar of Orthodox Saints.

Little has been published in English about these Saints, and most of what has appeared thus far is of little value. No work in English has even attempted to present the *Orthodox monastic tradition* which inspired and formed the great Russian Fathers. Indeed, the Russian religious intelligentsia of the Diaspora has been largely at fault for spreading false ideas about these Saints and their tradition. The most accessible works on Russian Saints in English (those of Fedotov and de Grunwald) are so filled with inaccuracies and

distortions, with a Roman Catholic terminology totally foreign to Orthodoxy, and with an astonishingly fanciful notion of Orthodoxy, sanctity, and monasticism — as to be more a hindrance than a help to the serious student of the Russian monastic tradition.

One Orthodox scholar of the Russian Diaspora — Ivan Michailovich Kontzevitch (†1965) — devoted his life to a serious study of the Orthodox spiritual tradition. Unlike the Westernized Russian intelligentsia, he was not an "academic" scholar, but proceeded rather from the living Orthodox tradition. Even while living in the Diaspora in the 1920's, he continued to receive spiritual guidance from Elder Nectarius of Optina, and to mould his life and thought, not on the heterodox "wisdom" of the West, but on the age-old tradition of Holy Russia. Having acquired a theological education, he planned to write (in Russian) a trilogy of works on this tradition: the first, on the spiritual tradition of ancient Russia, before Peter I (*The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*, Paris, 1952); the second, on Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky (which was never completed); and the third, on the Optina Elders (*Optina Monastery and Its Epoch*, published posthumously by Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N. Y., 1973).

The present work, which was inspired by Professor Kontzevitch, is a kind of "source book" in English for the first volume of his trilogy in Russian on ancient Russia, and utilizes above all two of his key ideas regarding the Orthodox spiritual tradition: (1) that the Lives of the Saints are the chief source of our knowledge of the Russian spiritual tradition of this period, and a careful examination of them will give a clear idea of this tradition to one who is well versed in the phenomena and the vocabulary of true Orthodox spirituality; and (2) that it is evident — as a result of such an examination — that the Russian spiritual tradition is not at all something "uniquely Russian," or something novel in Orthodox history, but is identical in essence with the whole Byzantine tradition of spirituality, which in its monastic formulation comes down to us from the Fathers of the Egyptian desert. Indeed, the Orthodox reader of these Lives — which have been taken from sources in Russian and Slavonic as close to the original Lives as possible — will find that they breathe the same spiritual fragrance as the Lives of the great Fathers of the Egyptian desert, and have the same signs of true Orthodox monastic life: the "mental activity" of the Jesus Prayer, spiritual guidance by Elders, "revelation of thoughts" to the Elder, spiritual labors joined with love of neighbor. The Introduction by Professor Kontzevitch consists of excerpts from his book, *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*, referring to the period of the "Northern Thebaid" — the great spiritual current which proceeds from St. Sergius of Radonezh in the 14th century (and behind him, from Byzantine

Hesychasm) to the end of the 17th century, when Russia, although outwardly in spiritual decline, was preparing its forces for a final spiritual current which has come down to our own times — that of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky and the great Elders of the 18th to the 20th centuries.

It was in the mid-19th century that a pious Orthodox Russian, Andrew Muraviev, undertook a pilgrimage to the almost-forgotten monasteries of the North and brought them back to life for the readers of his book, giving the whole region the name by which we now know it.* At that time most of these monasteries still existed.

Today, however, these monasteries have been closed and destroyed, and m ost of them removed from the face of the earth. Why speak of them any more, and give the Lives of their founders and the history of their monastic tradition, as we attempt to do in these pages — and that not merely as an example of dead history, but of living tradition, as is our definite intention? While these Lives were being printed separately in *The Orthodox Word*, one of the leading modernist "Orthodox theologians" chastized in print "those who call to non-existent deserts," evidently regarding such Lives as an appeal to a religious "romanticism" and idealism totally out of step with contemporary conditions of life. Why, indeed should we inspire today's Orthodox youth with the call of the "Northern Thebaid," which has in it something more attractive and somehow more accessible for a 20th-century zealot than the barren desert of Egypt?

First of all, the monastic life here described has not entirely disappeared from the earth; it is still possible to find Orthodox monastic communities which teach the spiritual doctrine of the Holy Fathers, and to lead the Orthodox monastic life even in the 20th century — with constant self-reproach over how far one falls short of the Lives of the ancient Fathers in these times. Our True Orthodox Christians of the Russian Church Outside of Russia have preserved the living monastic tradition of Holy Russia and are linked directly to Optina, Valaam, St. Seraphim's Diveyevo, St. Job's Pochaev, Lesna, and of course to the monastic citadels of the Holy Land and the Holy Mountain of Athos. The wise seeker can find his "desert" even in our barren 20th century.

But this book is not intended only for such fortunate ones.

Every Orthodox Christian should know the Lives of the Fathers of the desert, which together with the Lives of the Martyrs give us the model for our own life of Christian struggle. Even so, every Orthodox Christian should know of Valaam, of Solovki, of Svir, of Siya and Obnora and White Lake, of the

*Andrew Muraviev, *The Russian Thebaid of the North*, St. Petersburg, 1855.

In Memoriam

I. M. KONTZEVITCH

True Orthodox Patristic Scholar

Tenth Anniversary

JUNE 23|JULY 6 of this year marks the tenth anniversary of the repose of the great Patristic scholar, I. M. Kontzevitch, who gave to us above all the true evaluation of the spiritual-monastic tradition of Russia as an authentic continuation of the Orthodox tradition of Byzantium. He is one of a number of humble Patristic thinkers of the Russian Diaspora who, being rejected and disdained by the proud Westernizers of "Parisian" pseudo-Orthodoxy, have kept alive the flame of the true Orthodox tradition of Russia.

Skete of Sora, and of the Angel-like men who dwelled there before being translated to heaven, living the Orthodox spiritual life to which every Orthodox Christian is called, according to his strength and the conditions of his life. Every Orthodox Christian should be inspired by their life of struggle far from the ways of the world. There is no "romanticism" here. The actual "romantics" of our time are the reformers of "Parisian Orthodoxy" who, disparaging the authentic Orthodox tradition, wish to "sanctify the world," to prostitute the spiritual tradition "for the life of the world," to replace the authentic Orthodox world-view with a this-worldly counterfeit of it based on modern Western

PROF. I. M. KONTZEVITCH
Photograph taken about 1935

thought. The spiritual life of the true monastic tradition is the *norm* of our Christian life, and we had better be informed of it before the terrible last day when we are called to account for our lax life. We shall not be judged for our ignorance of the vocabulary of contemporary "Orthodox theology," but we shall surely be judged for not struggling on the path of salvation. If we do not live like these Saints, then let us at least increase our far-too-feeble struggles for God, and offer our fervent tears of repentance and our constant self-reproach at falling so short of the standard of perfection which God has shown us in His wondrous Saints.

The NORTHERN THEBAÏD

OBNORA MONASTERY CAVE-CHURCH

built over St. Paul's original earthen cell

An Excerpt from a New Book

OF THE ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA BROTHERHOOD

Introduction

by Prof. Ivan Michailovich Kontzevitch

1. THE 14th CENTURY

THE 14TH CENTURY in Russia was not a period of "transition," as has previously been thought; rather in its political and cultural movements it was the brilliant epoch of the "Russian Renaissance." This high cultural movement was evoked in Russia by the approaching wave of the Byzantine Renaissance under the Paleologues which embraced the whole Orthodox world. Hesychasm, which at this time had penetrated and inspired all cultural manifestations of life, could not but reach Russia together with the general wave of cultural activities. Moscovite Russia was not isolated at this period. On the contrary, this very 14th century and the first half of the next century were marked in Russia by lively contacts with other Orthodox peoples, and in this way Hesychasm, which was the soul of the Orthodox East, was communicated to Russia in various ways.

First of all, Russian literature at this time was under the influence of South Slavonic literature. Secondly, throughout this period Bulgarian church figures had an immediate influence on Russia. Thirdly, Serbian art, penetrated by the spirit of Hesychasm, made its influence known in the Russian art of that time. Fourthly, a whole series of Russian Metropolitans of this time shared the Palamite view (Hesychasm). And fifthly, this whole time there existed an unbroken living contact with the East; this was expressed in the pilgrimages of Russians to the East and the coming of Greeks to Russia.

The two great hesychasts, Metropolitan Alexius and St. Sergius, with whom none of their contemporaries could compare, were the founders of a new epoch of spiritual rebirth and the restoration of the inward activity (the true Orthodox spiritual life), which had grown weak or been all but forgotten owing to the Tatar incursions. The monastic blossoming in northeastern Russia is the fruit of the co-operation of these two lamps of the Russian Church: its head, Metropolitan Alexius, and the great Elder of the Russian land, St. Sergius.

The whole character of this epoch might be summed up in the symbol of spiritual rebirth and the higher spiritual struggle which bears the name Hesychasm, which put its seal upon all manifestations of church and cultural life. And all manifestations, whether of literature, or art, or the coming to Russia of church figures, or the immediate mutual contacts owing to frequent journeys — all these aided in Russia the spreading of this spiritual current.

2. THE NORTHERN DESERT

"With the beginning of the 14th century there is to be observed in Russia a manifestation which is to be explained by the historical circumstances of Mongol times, a manifestation unknown in the local conditions of the East. It has become accepted to call this *monastic colonization*. Going away from people into the inaccessible forest depths, which in the ancient Russian language were called 'deserts,' a hermit for a long time labors alone, being visited only by wild beasts. No sooner does news of him go about the people and the fame of him become known, than there begin to gather about the small cell of the hesychast in the forest desert his future co-dwellers and fellow ascetics, one after the other. With axe and shovel they labor with their own hands, adding labor to labor, chopping trees, sewing fields, building cells and a church. A monastery grows up. And to the murmuring of the age-old forest, to the wild howling and growling of wolves and bears, there is now joined a new sound — to be sure, at first a weak one — a resounding voice; and as it were to the call of the new voice, to the welcome sounding of the monastery semantron, peasants appear at the monastery. They ceaselessly chop down the forests, lay out roads into the thickets which were previously inaccessible, build settlements and villages near the monastery... The villages grow and turn into towns or even cities... This movement was inspired by the greatest ascetic of the Russian land, the Father of subsequent monasticism, Saint Sergius of Radonezh, who, in the expression of his biographer, was 'abbot of a multitude of brethren and father of many monasteries,' and according to the Chronicler, 'founder and teacher of all the monasteries which are in Russia'."†

What was the life of the desert-dweller when he lived "alone in solitude" in the bosom of virginal nature? Anchorites sought out places which might inspire in the soul an elevated feeling, a feeling of God's presence. The place of the second hermitage of Siya (where Saint Anthony of Siya labored) "was in the mountains and was surrounded by mountains as by walls; and in the valley between those mountains was a lake, which was called Padoun. In these mountains a great forest was to be seen, and at the base of these mountains stood the cell of the Saint. Around it were twelve birch trees, as white as snow. Most melancholy was this place, so that one coming to see this wilderness would have great contrition, for the very sight of the place could bring the beholder of it into tender feeling."

Yet the very wilderness which moved and exalted the soul was at the same time a threatening power, full of every possible danger. The same St. Anthony of Siya, in the words of his biographer, "went into the northern lands which lie in the region of the Dvina, passing through the impenetrable forests, gorges, and swamps which lie near the White Sea, and the mossy places and inconstant marshes, and the many lakes, seeking a suitable place, wherever God might instruct him to stay." In these mossy places and swamps "wild beasts dwelled, bears and wolves, deer and hares and foxes, a great multitude of them, which were like herds." However, he lived in harmony in their midst, as did other ascetics who had attained dispassion. "When St. Ser-

†S.I. Smirnov: *How the Ascetics Served the World* (in Russian), Holy Trinity Lavra, 1903, p. 24.

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Chapter Two

THE BATTLE AGAINST DESPONDENCY, SLOTHFULNESS AND WEAKNESS

WHEN THIS HAPPENS, occupy the mind with the thought of death. Come mentally to the grave; behold there one who has been dead four days: how he grows dark, bloated, and gives off an intolerable foul odor, is eaten by worms, having lost his fair appearance and beauty. Then look in another place: here there lie in the grave the bones of young and old, the beautiful and the ugly; and consider: who was fair, or ugly? Who was a faster, a continent man, an ascetic, or a careless man? And did it bring benefit to rich men that they had repose and enjoyment in this world? Remember then the endless torments of which the holy books speak: the fire of gehenna, the outer darkness, the gnashing of teeth, the infernal tartarus, the unsleeping worm. And depict to yourself how sinners cry out there with bitter tears, and no one delivers them. They lament and weep over themselves, and no one has pity on them. They sigh from the depths of the heart, and no one has compassion on them. They implore for help, complain about their grief, and no one heeds them. Think how creatures, each in its own time, unfailingly serve the Lord their Creator. Reflect concerning the most glorious miracles of God which have been performed upon His slaves from the beginning of the world, and especially of how the Lord, having humbled himself and suffered for the sake of our salvation, has benefacted and sanctified the human race; and for all this give thanksgiving to God, the Lover of mankind. Remember the future endless life and the Kingdom of Heaven, the repose and unutterable joy. Stand firm, do not leave off the prayer of Jesus. If you will recall and reflect on all this, then despondency, slothfulness and weakness will disappear, and your soul will come to life as from the dead, by the grace of Christ.

Chapter Three

AN INSTRUCTION MOVING TO CONTRITION WHICH CUTS OFF ALL SELF-EXALTATION AND HUMAN PRIDE AND CONVERTS THE SOUL TO FOUNTAINS OF TEARS

IF YOU SEEK such contrition, it is most sweet and soul-profiting to pay heed to the following instruction concerning the departure of your soul. Now, O man, you are taking enjoyment of beauty, attractiveness, and glory, and spend your life in vain adornment, hoping thus to spend hour after hour, day after day, month after month, year after year. O man! Your life is all the time coming to an end. Life passes by; time little by little goes past; the frightful Throne of the Lord is being prepared; the Righteous Judge is drawing near. O man! The judgement is at the doors; expect a frightful answer. The fiery river, boiling, is resounding with a crackling and with powerful sparks. Frightful torments are raging, awaiting the torture of sinners. O man! Labor, strive, struggle. Before your death a herald will not come! The reward of the Saints is at hand; crowns are being prepared for the righteous; for those who labor and endure sorrows, the Kingdom of Heaven is opened; endless repose is at hand, and unutterable joy is being prepared. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the heart of man, that which God has prepared for those who love Him.

O man! Have you heard of torments? Why do you not tremble and become frightened? O man! Have you heard of unending joy? Why do you not struggle? Why do you waste the time of your life in tumult and vanity? Later you will not find another time, even though you might search with tears. O man! Even if you live for a hundred, for a thousand years in this world with every food and enjoyment, fattening yourself like a calf, and making yourself look good, like a fox — when the frightful end, death, will come, then our life will seem as a single day, and all satiety and adornment will disappear without a trace, like the flower of the grass, which quickly falls away. O man! Your life from birth to maturity and old age is like a single day, and after this is the speedy, unexpected end of your life. O man! Bring to mind: where are your grandfathers and great-grandfathers, where are your father, and mother, and brothers, where are your relatives and close friends? Did they not all depart this life? Did they not also wish to live a little longer in this world, to enjoy themselves, adorn themselves, and make merry in their prosperity? But behold — against their own desire they were taken away. Remember that you are earth, you are nourished by the earth, and you will go again into the earth: the flesh will disintegrate and rot, will be eaten by worms, and the bones will crumble like dust. Bring to mind the days of eternity and the years of past generations. How many kings and princes there were who lived in enjoyment and adornment! And what did this help them in their departure from this temporal life; where then were their enjoyment and adornment? For now they are earth and ashes!

How many strong, rich, valiant young men, blossoming with youth and beauty, there have been in this world; and how did their mighty strength, their pleasant youth blossoming with beauty, help them? It is as if all this had never been. Thousands of thousands and ten thousands of ten thousands, or as the sand of the sea, have been the men of every kind; and all of them departed this life. Some of them could not give any kind of answer at the hour of death, but unexpectedly, standing or sitting, were taken away by death. Some gave up the ghost while eating and drinking; others died suddenly while travelling; some, while lying in bed and thinking to refresh their body by a small, brief sleep, in such a condition have fallen asleep in an eternal sleep; some miserably endured agonies at their last hour, beholding fearful , threatening spectacles, the mere depiction of which can terrify us not a little. And there have been other various and sudden deaths!

Oh, Oh! Woe, woe! How the soul weeps before death, raises its eyes to the Angels, stretches out its arms to men, pitifully implores,-- but receives no help. In truth, the vanity of man!

Oh, oh! Woe, woe! Frightful and terrible is it to all when the soul is forcibly separated from the body. The soul departs with weeping, and the body is given over to the earth. Then all hope in the vanity, charm, glory and enjoyment of earthly things is converted to nothing.

Oh, oh! Woe, woe! A great weeping and lamentation, a great sighing and affliction is the separation of the soul. Oh, woe! Woe! Short is this path on which we go with the body. This life is smoke, steam, dirt, ashes, dust, stench. As smoke disperses in the air, as the flower of the grass quickly falls away and fades, as a horse quickly runs away, as water flows quickly by, and as the fog ascends from the surface of the earth, and as the dew of the morning vanishes, or as a bird flies by: thus does the life of this age pass away. As the wind passes by, so does time go and pass by, and the days of our life come to an end. It is better to endure more and to love fierce and cruel sorrows in this world, than to have a thousand years of joy and repose in this age as against a single day of the age to come. For the path of earthly life is not long; it appears for a short time and soon passes by. In truth, vanity and corruption is everything sweet, beautiful and glorious in this world. For these things, just like a shadow, being altered, pass everything by, and thry are in this world like a dream. Now someone is, and a little later he departs; today he is with us, and in the morning is given over to the tomb.

Oh, oh! Woe, woe! Truly, in vain does everyone born of earth trouble himself! We all change, we all will die: kings and princes, judges and powerful ones, rich and poor, and every human being. Today he rejoices with us, takes enjoyment and adorns himself, and in the morning we weep over him and lament and mourn. Oh, man! Come to the tomb. Behold there a dead man lying. He is not glorious, not good of appearance, not beautiful. How he is swollen up and gives off a foul odor! The flesh rots and is corrupted and is devoured by worms; the bones are laid bare and the whole body crumbles to dust.

Oh, oh! Woe, woe! O sinful soul, what a frightful vision! Woe, woe! Made rich with the senses of soul and body, created most wisely, there is in you now neither splendor, nor good appearance, nor beauty. Whither has your bodily beauty and splendid youth disappeared? Where is the smiling face, where the splendid and bright eyes? Where is the eloquent tongue of Aristotle? Where is the breath, where the sweet, soft and gentle voice? Where is the eloquence of wisdom, the dignified walk, the dreams and desires and the vain cares? All this has fallen away and is eaten by worms. Behold how some of them come out of the mouth and nostrils, others from the eyes and ears, others from the posterior opening, and how the whole is filled with ugliness and foulness.

Oh, oh! Woe, woe! Beholding the dust lying in the tomb, let us say to ourselves: "Who is the king and the noble, who the poor man? Who is the master, and who the slave? Who is the glorious, who the inglorious? Who is the wise, who the fool? Where are the beauty and enjoyment of this world? Where are the power and wisdom of this age? Where are the dreams and the short-lived charms? Where is the corruptible and vain wealth? Where are the silver and gold ornaments? Where is the multitude of slaves standing by? Where are all the cares of this vain age? There is nothing left of all this; the man is deprived of all this."

Oh, oh! Woe, woe! Truly, in vain does everyone born of earth trouble himself. I behold you in the tomb and am terrified at your appearance. I behold you and tremble and shed tears with my whole heart. Oh, oh! Cruel and merciless death, who can flee you? You devour the human race like unripe wheat.

And thus, brethren, having come to see the shortness of our life and the vanity of this age, let us take care for the hour of death, leaving off the tumult of this world and the useless worldly cares; for neither wealth nor glory nor enjoyment will remain with us after death; and nothing of this will descend with us into the tomb. Only good deeds will go there and defend us and remain with us. We were born naked, and naked we depart again. And so, hearing this, we should not only sit in silence in our cells, restrain our tongue, take care for our souls, and weep in prayer over our sins, but we should even hide ourselves under the earth, mourn there over our sins while we are still alive, and live while dying for the sake of God in struggle. Knowing our speedy departure, let us before death wear out our corruptible body, because after death also it must remain corruptible until the Lord God resurrects us from the dead on the Last Day and grants to us immortal life and the endless Kingdom forever. Amen.

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gius settled in the forest of Radonezh," in the words of his biographer, "the desert was impenetrable; there were no trails, and it was untrodden by the foot of man. Many beasts and creeping serpents then appeared to him; diverse beasts came in multitudes to his cell not only at night, but even during the day; wolves began to dig and howl around his cell, and sometimes bears appeared, drew near to him, and surrounded him without doing any harm." St. Macarius of Kolyazin (†1483, March 17), again, "had the custom of going about the desert places; and if there were wild beasts inhabiting a wilderness, they they would walk with him like the meekest sheep; and what is more, they submitted to him and many times took food from him." The northern climate was likewise severe and merciless to defenseless human nature. In the Life of Saint Anthony of Siya it is said that during the winter from great storms the anchorite's cell would be covered with snow, and he "lived under the snow as in a cave, and sent up to God his fervent prayers with warm tears." From where did the saints obtain this power, thanks to which they could conquer the laws of nature? How, for example, could Saint Paul of Obnora live in the hollow of a linden tree for three years? In his Life it is said: "He was a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit." In these words we may find the answer also to such a supernatural life of the Saint.

We know the ferocity of the Russian forests, and the fact that he lived in the hollow of a linden tree shows that the anchorite managed without fire. Such a life surpasses human power, since anyone would have to die in the first severe freeze.

This phenomenon is explained by Saint Seraphim in his Conversation with Motovilov on the acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit. After the grace of God had shone upon them in visible fashion at the prayer of the Saint, the latter said to Motovilov: "No pleasantness of earthly fragrance can be compared with the fragrance which we now smell, for we are now surrounded by the fragrance of the Holy Spirit. Notice, Your God-love, how you told me that around us it is as warm as a bath; but look, neither on you nor on me does the snow melt, nor above us either. Therefore, this warmth is not in the air, but in ourselves. This is that very warmth of which the Holy Spirit, in the words of the prayer, causes us to cry out to the Lord: 'Warm me with the warmth of Thy Holy Spirit.' Being warmed by it, men and women desert-dwellers did not fear the winter frost, being clothed as in warm fur coats in a garment of grace woven by the Holy Spirit." These words refer to the Russian ascetics. But in the Egyptian desert the picture was different and the nature of the manifestation of help from Above was different also.

In the Life of St. Onuphrius (†4th century, June 12) there is a description of the journey of St. Paphnutius in "the inner desert, where an anchorite lived in the midst of sand-dunes under a blazing sun." This is one of a series of supernatural lives. These anchorites, as also later Russian anchorites, following their example, for the sake of God renounced everything that belongs to human nature, all the way to the instinct of self-preservation, and threw themselves into the abyss of God's mercy unconditionally, preserving only the faith which moves mountains. And this faith, in both Russia and Egypt, proved to be justified. But in Russia anchorites were saved from frost by the warmth of the Holy Spirit, whereas in Egypt, in the midst of a barren desert, springs

suddenly gushed forth, and palms grew up with branches bearing fruit every month. St. Onuphrius said to St. Paphnutius about those like himself: "God sends to us holy Angels," who offer food to them, bring water out of the rocks, and strengthen them to such an extent that in them are fulfilled the words of the Prophet Isaiah, who said: *They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall take wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary* (IS. 40: 31). To the question of St. Paphnutius as to how he received Communion, St. Onuphrius replied as follows: "An Angel of the Lord comes to me, bringing with him the Most Pure Mysteries of Christ, and gives me Holy Communion. And not to me only does the Angel come with Divine Communion, but also to the other ascetics who live for the sake of God in the desert and do not see the face of man, and in giving Communion he fills their hearts with unutterable rejoicing; and if someone desires to see a man, an Angel takes him and raises him into the heavens so that he might see the Saints and rejoice. And the soul of such a desert-dweller shines like the light and rejoices in spirit, having been vouchsafed to see heavenly good things. And then the desert-dweller forgets about all his labors undertaken in the desert. And when the desert-dweller returns to his place he begins all the more fervently to serve the Lord, hoping to receive in the heavens that which he was vouchsafed to see."

That which was in the fourth century in the Egyptian desert was repeated in the Russian desert, in the Sarov forests even of the 19th century. "Once when reading the words of the Savior," says St. Seraphim to John Tikhonov, that *in My Father's house there are many mansions*, I the wretched one stopped in thought upon them and desired to see these heavenly dwellings... And the Lord, in actual fact, in His great mercy did not deprive me of consolation according to my faith, and showed me these eternal abodes, in which I, a poor earthly wanderer, being raised up to there in a moment, saw the unutterable heavenly beauty and those who live there: the Great Forerunner and Baptizer of the Lord, John, the Apostles, Hierarchs, Martyrs and our monastic Fathers, Anthony the Great, Paul of Thebes, Sabbas the Sanctified, Onuphrius the Great and Mark of Thrace, and all the Saints shining in unutterable glory and joy such as eye has not seen, nor ear has heard, nor has entered the thought of man, but such as God has prepared for those that love Him."

St. Seraphim is separated from St. Onuphrius by fifteen centuries, but the mystical phenomena are one and the same. St. Seraphim is almost our contemporary: some of us have known those who have personally seen him. This is not some mysterious remote antiquity in the mist of the ages. But it is precisely now, when our spiritual wings have become atrophied and we have forgotten what possibilities are concealed in our spirit, that St. Seraphim was sent to us, in all the power and spiritual might of the ancient Fathers, so that we might remember our divine sonship and strive towards the limitless perfection of our Heavenly Father: *Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect* (Matt. 5:46).

St. Seraphim himself thus understood his mission: in the just-cited conversation with Motovilov, in conclusion he said the following: "I think that the Lord will help you always to keep this [action of grace] in your mem-

"Behold the life of Innocent Adam in Eden" — St. Sergius coming from Nurma (left) seeing St. Paul amongst peaceful animals.

The death of St. Sergius of Nurma

ICONOGRAPHIC SCENES OF THE LIFE OF ST. PAUL
from the *Russian Pilgrim*, 1910.

St. Sergius blesses Paul to leave

St. Paul in his linden-tree hollow

The blessed repose of St. Paul amidst his disciples.

ory... all the more in that it is not given to you alone to understand it, but through you to the whole world, so that you yourself might be confirmed in the work of God and might be useful to others."

3. THE KEY TO THE DESERT LIFE: LOVE

To all that has been said one may yet add the following: the dominating characteristic of the northeastern ascetics is *love*. "Having acquired love for God and neighbor, thou didst fulfill the chief part of the Law and the Prophets; for he who does not love his neighbor cannot love God. But thou, O holy father Paul, didst fulfill both" (Sixth Song of the Canon to St. Paul of Obnora).

St. Seraphim was also distinguished by such an exceptional love; all who came to him he called "my joy." This resemblance is not accidental and is not a simple coincidence. Although the two ascetics lived in different times and are separated by four hundred years, they are made kin by the fact that both of them went by experience through the same path, the same school of the Holy Fathers, and were crowned with the same crown of virtue — perfect love.

The explanation of this mystery (the attainment of true love) is given us by St. Isaac the Syrian (7th century): "There is no means of arousing in the soul Divine Love, in pursuit of which you mystically run to anchoritism, if the soul has not overcome the passions. But you have said that your soul, not having overcome the passions, has loved the love of God, and in this there is no order... Everyone says that he desires to love God, and not only Christians say this, but even those who incorrectly worship God. And this word is pronounced by everyone as his own; but in the pronunciation of such words the tongue only moves, while the soul does not feel what is said." First one must heal the soul: "As a sick man does not say to his father: 'make me king,' but first takes care of his infirmity, and after his complete recovery the kingdom of his father by itself becomes his kingdom; so also the sinner, offering repentance and receiving the health of his soul, enters with the Father into the realm of pure being and reigns in the glory of his Father."

The gift of love is possessed by all true ascetics and hesychasts who have uprooted the passions. Of such ascetics St. Isaac the Syrian says that if anyone has no opportunity to manifest love of his neighbor in an active way by reason of his life of silence and his constant remaining in seclusion, then it is sufficient before God to limit oneself to mental love (prayerful intercession). "For if one has no communication at all with men and is entirely immersed in thought in God, when he is dead to everything and remote from everyone — such a one is not commanded to serve men and please them. And if one from time to time interrupts his labor and, after the fulfilling of his rule, meets with men and is consoled by communion with them, but is negligent over his brethren who are in sorrows, he is unmerciful and cruel. He fails to condescend to participate in works of love because of an insufficiency of mercy, because of self-esteem and false thoughts. He who disdains the sick will not see the light. He who turns his face away from a sorrowing one, — his day is darkened. And he who disdains the voice of a sufferer, his sons in darkness will seek out their houses by groping. Let us not mock the great name of silence by our

ignorance. For to every kind of life there is its proper time and place and distinguishing characteristic."*

In this citation St. Isaac the Syrian speaks of the two sides of the Christian religious ideal, namely, active mercy and contemplative anchoretism which flees communication with men. ("I cannot be with God and men." Abba Arsenius). Professor Zarin has investigated in detail these "two paths," showing their equal value and even the duo-unity of the religious ideal, which includes both its contemplative and active sides. The aim of this ideal is to raise up and bring into reality love for God and for one's neighbor, for the sake of God, inseparably but also without confusion.† From the words of St. Isaac already cited one may see in what way this aim must be realized in practice in the very life of the ascetics.

4. THE FATHER OF THE MONASTIC RENEWAL: ST. SERGIUS

St. Sergius was the chief inspirer and planter in Russia of contemplative life. The Holy Trinity Monastery produced fifty monasteries, which in their turn produced forty more. Hieromonk Nikon, in his Life of St. Sergius, indicates one hundred names of monk-saints who came from the monastery of St. Sergius. This was a spiritual school which produced a blossoming of contemplative labor in the whole northeastern part of Russia.

St. Sergius was an elder not only for the monks in submission to him, but also for laymen. But something even more astonishing happened: there came to him for a word of instruction contemplative ascetics already wise in experience of many years, such as St. Sergius of Nurma (†1412, Oct. 7), who came from Athos, St. Euthymius of Suzdal (†1404, Apr. 1), St. Demetrius of Priluka (†1392, Feb. 11), St. Stephen of Makhra (†1406, July 14), and others; they are called the "fellow-conversers" of St. Sergius. These fellow-conversers show us the greatness of the spiritual image in which St. Sergius was manifested in the eyes of his contemporaries, being a teacher of teachers and an instructor of instructors. "Can it be that in these distant lands, so shortly before converted to the light of Christ, such a lamp has shone forth, at whom even our ancient Fathers would be astonished?" cried out the Greek bishop who doubted; and for his doubt he was chastized with blindness, and immediately after this he was healed by the Saint himself. And in truth, the spiritual visage of St. Sergius attained an unutterable beauty which might astonish even the ancient Fathers.

The miraculous apparitions in the Life of St. Sergius are characteristic of the ascetics of the tradition of the East, who went first through the path of outward labors (*praxis*) and attained, as the fruit of these, Divine vision (*theoria*). And as St. Gregory Palamas says, "Being removed from the material, in which he [the ascetic] at first travels on the path known to him... he proceeds to the Truth by the unutterable power of the Spirit, and by an unutterable spiritual reception he hears unutterable words and sees the unbehold-

*St. Isaac the Syrian: 55th Homily, Russian ed., Sergius Posad, 1893, pp. 255-259.

†Prof. S. Zarin: *Asceticism*, St. Petersburg, 1907, Vol. I, book 1, p. 107.

able, and already here on earth he is, and becomes, a miracle."* One must assume that it was for similar mysteries and depths of the inward ascetical life that the holy fellew-conversers of St. Sergius came to him and took counsel.

Spiritual attainments, however, are not the lot of the majority, but are accessible only to a few chosen ones. Such was the young monk Cyril, the future founder of the White Lake Monastery. And this is why St. Sergius, when he came to the Simonov Monastery, hastened to go to him in the bread-bakery, where his obedience was, and instructed him for hours, paying no attention to others. And the testament of St. Sergius passed through St. Cyril to the subsequent ascetic tradition of the whole of northeastern Russia, the "Northern Thebaid." Among the various disciples of St. Sergius were two especially clear examples of contemplative ascetic life: Sts. Sylvester and Paul of Obnora. In the monastery of St. Paul there has remained a written memorial which confirms this. This document, which concerns the guidance of young monks, contains expressions such as: "Spiritual prayer," "concentration of spirit," and "silence," which serve as signs of the school of Eastern asceticism.

5. THE NORTHERN THEBAID

The Northern Thebaid of Russia is in no way inferior to its African archetype. The dwellers of the virgin forests beyond the Volga in their spiritual power, the might of their ascetic life, and the height of their attainments were equal to the Fathers of the first centuries of Christianity. But just as the sultry African nature with its clear blue sky, lush colors, its burning sun, and its incomparable moonlit nights, is distinct from the aquarelle soft tones of Russia's northern nature with the blue surface of its lakes and the soft shades of its leafy forests, with their emerald-green of early spring and the rich fulness of their golden auburn tones in September — in the same way the sanctity of the Fathers of the Egyptian desert, elemental and mighty like lava erupting from a volcano, with the brightness of the southern nature, is distinct from the sanctity of Russia, which is quiet, lofty, and as crystal-clear as the radiant and quiet evening of the Russian spring. But both in Russia and in Egypt there is the same "noetic activity," the same silence. In the Life of St. Paul of Obnora it is said: "St. Paul, being humble in mind and hating glory and honor from men, loving silence and being a lover of God, entreated St. Sergius for a long time that he command him to remain in solitude." Of St. Paul again it is said that he remained "singing and praying constantly and cleansing the vision of his mind." He took care for the purity of his thoughts, "lest there cleave to his mind any of earthly things." Later we read how he "with fervor constantly prayed to God, diligently laboring, cleansing the vision of his mind." Before his repose, St. Paul permanently "began to live in silence, going away from any human dwelling and having his mind constantly in prayer and heedfulness towards God, cleansing his vision and gathering the light of divine

*Quoted in Archimandrite Cyprian, "The Spiritual Forerunners of St. Gregory Palamas," in *Theological Thought*, Paris, 1942, p. 130.

understanding in his heart, and in his purity beholding the glory of the Lord, whereby he was a chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit."

Muraviev, the author of *The Northern Thebaid,* during the time of his pilgrimage to the Vologda region, when crossing the river Nurma, saw at the bridge a solitary chapel and entered it in order to venerate St. Paul. "His meek visage greeted me there," says Muraviev, "in the rank of other desert-dwellers at the side of the Crucified Lord for Whose sake they had labored so much. In the hands of St. Paul was a scroll with the inscription: *Oh, if you knew the whole power of love.* Such a short reminder in the wilderness was especially moving for the heart and was more eloquent than many oratorical speeches." Right here there stood also a pitcher of water with a ladle for the quenching of the thirst of travellers on hot days. "And I remembered the word of the Gospel: *Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward* (Matt. 10:42)."*

6. THE 15TH CENTURY AND AFTER

The 14th century was the time of the rebirth of anchoritism and monasticism, the century of St. Sergius. The 15th century is still rich in sprouts of the spiritual seeds sown in previous centuries. From the monasteries already founded, new monasteries arose, giving new Saints. This was a continuation of the epoch of the 14th century, its blossoming, the "golden age" of Russian asceticism; but at the same time it was the eve of crisis and rupture. The Russian historian Soloviev has accurately written: "The rejection by Muscovite Russia of the Florentine Unia is one of those great decisions which determine the fate of peoples for many centuries ahead." The historical moment of the rejection of the Unia is one that drew after it a whole epoch. "After this the inward separation of the Russian world from the West, under the influence of the dream which burst forth of Moscow the Third Rome, firmly strengthened the specifically Eastern European character of Russian culture, and it was not wiped out either outwardly, nor all the more inwardly, by the great westernizing reform of Peter the Great."† Such was the incalculably great significance of this historical step, the rejection of the Unia.

Let us speak now briefly of the inner changes and shocks which ascetic life underwent in this transitional epoch and the one which followed. Monasticism falls into two currents. The main branch proceeds from St. Cyril of White Lake, the fellow-converser of St. Sergius and the greatest Saint living at the beginning of the 15th century. He is at the head of that school of spiritual activity which with the lightness and wingedness of spiritual exaltation and Divine vision has room also for service to the world, feeding the hungry in difficult years and nourishing spiritually the people who came to the monastery. To this school belongs the merit of continuing the colonization of the northeast which was begun in the century of St. Sergius. St. Cyril's tradition is given to the "Northern Thebaid" by St. Dionysius of Glushitsa (†1437, June 1), who likewise lived in the White Lake Monastery; it was he who

* Muraviev, *The Northern Thebaid*, St. Petersburg, 1855, pp. 23-4 (Russian).
† A. Kartashev, *Holy Prince Vladimir*, Paris, 1938, p. 18.

painted the portrait of the great Saint himself (see page 48). In the Lives of the ascetics of Vologda and Komel one can feel a reflection of St. Cyril's testament. Spreading to the northeast, the "Northern Thebaid" is still blossoming in the 16th century. But in the 17th century only in the far north, on the periphery of the Russian state, do we encounter two more clearly delineated types of hesychasts: St. Diodorus of George-hill and St. Eleazar of Anzersk. After them the spiritual activity almost is lost to our view.

The second branch is concentrated around Moscow. Around it is formed a ring of monasteries. Although these latter do take their beginning from Holy Trinity Lavra, spiritually they are inferior to the "Northern Thebaid." These are the coenobitic monasteries which have no striving for contemplative life and silence. In the 15th century they give two Saints who have a decisive influence on later generations: St. Paphnutius of Borov (†1447, May 1) and St. Joseph of Volokolamsk (†1515, Sept. 9). These Saints, although they did not fully realize the ideals of St. Sergius of Radonezh and St. Cyril of White Lake, nonetheless were genuine ascetics and great benefactors of the people. However, their followers did not possess their grace-given qualities; in them the chief aim became the preservation of rules and rites. Intolerance, dry asceticism, severity, the idea of an irexorable and strict justice which obscures the idea of mercy: such is their tendency. Rule and rite dominate in everything, the keeping of outward rules is given the chief significance, in forgetfulness of the fact that the spirit gives life. On this ground the Old Believers' schism takes root, that great spiritual catastrophe which later cleared the way for the secularization of custom and the whole public life of Russia which was brought about by the reforms of Peter.

At the end of the 15th century there occurred the collision, so typical for the epoch, of these two currents in the persons of St. Nilus of Sora and St. Joseph of Volokolamsk. St. Nilus is the last of the Russian ascetics of the period to make a pilgrimage to the East with the aim of restoring the teaching of the spiritual activity. He visited Athos, where he became acquainted with the teaching of St. Gregory the Sinaite. St. Nilus is a monk of contemplative life and a hesychast of the purest type. He systematized the teaching of the inward activity. Characteristic of him is his absolute departure from and break with the world.

The dispute over monastery lands divided monasticism into two camps. At the head of the non-possessors stood St. Nilus of Sora, and at the head of those who favored the possession of monastery lands, St. Joseph of Volokolamsk. The latter was victorious. Thus, what was joined together in the spiritual school of St. Cyril — contemplative life and deeds of charity — were now no longer compatible. St. Nilus took the chief things: the inward activity and the non-possessiveness closely bound up with it; but he lost the tie with the life of the state, and in this was his weak side. St. Joseph, on the contrary, became organically one with the state; his type of monasticism continued the tradition of charitable works, but now it was at the expense of the spiritual activity. After St. Joseph the abbot of the Monastery of Volokolamsk was Daniel, the future Metropolitan of Moscow. As is known from history, he was an oath-breaker (in the case of Prince Shemyatich), a "conniver" with the

Great Prince (in his marriage to E. Glinskaya), and the destroyer of St. Maximus the Greek. Such a hypocritical type could come out of the monastery of St. Joseph thanks to the fact that in it there was no school of sobriety, no confession of thoughts, and attention was concentrated on the keeping of outward rules and not on the inward condition of the monks' souls. Therefore St. Joseph could be deceived, which in no case could have occurred, for example, with St. Sergius.

Monasticism should not refuse to serve the world for the sake of God, but for it the service of worldly principles is ruinous. When ascetic life departed from the world into the forest depths in the period of colonization, the world ran after it and submitted to it. But from the moment when monasticism undertook to serve worldly principles (the historical rupture of the Council of 1503, at which the question of monastery possessions was resolved in the positive), then the world began to enslave it until it decisively subjected it to itself.

In the middle of the 16th century the flight of heretics to the monks beyond the Volga called forth a persecution against the latter. Thus the field of battle was left to the Moscow tendency, that of St. Joseph.

At the same time both the type and character of sanctity were changing. The schools of hesychasts under the guidance of elders gave a numerous offspring: the following generations took advantage of the experience of the preceding ones. When this school was forgotten, individual asceticism came to the fore. Now the ascetic had to attain everything personally, by long and difficult experience, not having the ascetic tradition to rely on. Inward cleansing and sobriety were replaced by labors of mortification: iron helmets, chains, every kind of "iron" are its means. The path of sanctity became incomparably more difficult. St. Nilus of Sora in the Foreward to his "Rule" says: "Many have attained this radiant activity by means of instruction, but few have received it directly from God by force of ascetic labor and warmth of faith." He himself testifies of "the difficulty now of obtaining an undeceived instructor." This difficulty, noticed by St. Nilus, refers already to the end of the 15th century.

In the 14th century St. Sergius saw before him a multitude of beautiful birds which he had never seen before and heard a mystical voice from the heights of heaven, saying, "thus will thy flock of disciples increase, and after thee they will not die out." But in the 17th century the exact opposite was said to St. Irenarchus by the Blessed John the "Big-helmet": "God gives to thee a horse, and on this horse no one but thee will be able to ride or sit." In his immense exploit he remains alone. His path is unique and individual, and by the fierceness of its asceticism it can have no imitators.

And so Russian asceticism, being cut off from Byzantium and being left to itself, is subjected to a process of dissolution and falls into two tendencies. The spiritual tendency soon nearly perishes, and the school of spiritual activity is forgotten to such an extent that when Paisius Velichkovsky at the end of the 18th century will restore this school and re-establish the institution of elders, the latter will be greeted with mistrust and apprehension as an unheard-of novelty.

THE NORTHERN THEBAID

Russia in the 14th and 15th centuries proceeded under the sign of Byzantium: its direct influence is present in the rebirth of monasticism and in the labors of contemplative life. Russia drew spiritual power and inspiration from communion with the East. But towards the end of the 15th century these earlier ties became weak and were even cut off. The occasion for the rupture with the Greek tradition was the Council of Florence and then the devastation of the Orthodox East by the Turks. From this moment the authority of Byzantium quickly fell, and the very interest in it died out.

One must make note of yet another sad characteristic of the latter part of this period (16th-17th centuries): the changing attitude of the people to the anchorites. Now the world no longer went after them, but rose up against them. Monastery possessions grew larger and larger, and the peasants, fearing their own enslavement, considered the anchorites as their personal enemies, and sometimes they even killed them. Two Saints Adrian, of Andrusov (†1549, August 26) and of Poshekhonye (†1550, March 5) were killed with the aim of robbery. St. Agapitus of Makusheva (†1578, May 21) was killed by peasants and his body thrown in a river. Before this he had gone to Moscow to ask a blessing of the Metropolitan and land from the Tsar for a mill; at this mill he was killed. Further, St. Simon of Volomsk (†1613, July 21) was martyrically killed by peasants. The same fate befell St. Job the Gorge-dweller (†1628, August 6). St. Nilus of Stolbensk was saved from the midst of the forest which had been set on fire around him. By chance St. Arsenius of Komel was saved when his disciple was taken for him and killed. Finally, St. Leonid of Ustnedumsk (†1654, July 17), likewise banished, had to move his monastery from a mountain to a swamp.

With Saints Diodorus and Eleazar (17th century) we conclude our cycle of saints of the period of "ancient Russia." In them, before the virtual annihilation of monasticism and the secularization of monastic property, the Lord once more raised up Saints whose features very strongly remind us of the ancient desert-dwellers. To the end, the "Northern Thebaid" was faithful to the Byzantine spiritual tradition, thus sowing the seeds that were later to give rise to another great monastic movement: that of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky and the great Elders who followed him.

A Typical Skete Structure of the Northern Thebaid

The Life and Ascetic Labors of Our Father, Elder Paisius, Archimandrite of the Holy Moldavian Monasteries of Niamets and Sekoul. Part Twelve.

The Monastery of Niamets

THE MONASTERY of Niamets had for Moldavia a significance similar to that of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra or the Kiev-Caves Lavra for Russia. For several centuries it was a seedbed of Orthodox enlightenment in Moldavia, raising up within its walls many Moldavian hierarchs. For the Orthodox people it was an exalted school of moral life, giving in its monks an example of asceticism and devotion to the Orthodox Faith. In the years of the difficult trials of the Orthodox people of this land, of the civil wars between the princedoms of Moldavia and Vlachia and the frequent wars with the Turks, Poles, and Hungarians, during famines, fires, and other disasters, Orthodox Moldavia was drawn to the monastery and found in it both material and spiritual support.

The monastery was founded toward the end of the 14th century,when three monks — Sophronius, Pimen. and Siluan, disciples of St. Nicodemus the Sanctified — came with their disciples from Tisman, during the reign of Metropolitan Ioasaph. The ruler of Moldavia built for them a small church in honor of the Lord's Ascension. The monastery grew and was enriched by generous gifts of the Moldavian rulers, hierarchs, and other benefactors. The great Palamite Metropolitan, Gregory Tsamblak, was abbot in Niamets after his arrival in Moldavia until about 1420. There was always a close bond between the monastery and the Russian Orthodox Church, a bond that was only strengthened when Blessed Paisius settled there. The feast days of the great Russian Saints were celebrated with special solemnity: Sts. Anthony and Theodosius of the Kiev Caves, the Equal-to-the-Apostles Prince Vladimir and Princess Olga, St. Demetrius of Rostov, and others.

The chief holy object of the monastery is an ancient wonderworking Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God which had been given by the Byzantine Emperor John Paleologus to the Moldavian ruler John the Good, who in his turn gave it to the monastery at the beginning of the 15th century.*

67. Further Labors of Blessed Paisius.

HAVING RECEIVED the document and letter from the Prince, our Father began to govern both monasteries with God-given prudence, love, and meekness; and a two-fold burden of labors was added unto him. He built in Niamets, by the alms of the Prince, an infirmary and other necessary cells; for there came to him monks from outside, in addition to those of his own community, who were aged, lame, blind, and infirm, having nowhere to lay their head, weeping and lamenting, and who entreated him, for the sake of Christ, to have mercy on them. The Elder assigned them to the infirmary, and he commanded brother Honorius, who was mentioned above [Ch. 50], to use all diligence, and give all repose and care to them, instructing also those who served there to work as if unto the Lord, every Saturday to wash their undershirts and their heads, to cleanse their clothing, beds, and mats of everything, and especially of bedbugs, and in the summertime frequently to air the clothing in the sun and wind. Inside the infirmary, it was to be kept clean, and every day incense, or some other beneficial fragrance, was to be burned, so that the air would not be heavy. The food, and likewise the bread and wine, was to be of a better sort. And all were grateful and with tears glorified God, expressing ever their gratitude to the Elder for his mercifulness and care for them. Monks who came from outside likewise were given repose in the infirmary, as much as they wished — a week, or two, or a month; and no one ever said a word to them about why they were sitting idle. Some entreated our Father that he might bless them to spend the winter, and he blessed them; and to those who wanted for clothing or undergarments, he gave everything needful. And when the summer came and they departed, he gave them a double provision for the journey, and thus would let them go in peace. Likewise he accepted laymen of the male sex who were suffering from various infirmities and unclean spirits, who had nowhere to lay their head, and he fed them from the common table in a different infirmary; and they remained there as long as they wished, some even as long as they lived.

Then also the community of the brethren increased. In the monastery of Niamets there were 400 brothers, including those in the sketes which were

* This whole section has been added from Chetverikov, vol. 1, pp. 118-120.

nearby, apart from those in Sekoul, where there were always a hundred brothers. Of the latter the Elder would take some back with him, while others he would send to Sekoul from Niamets. All those in Sekoul he would visit only once in the year, on the feast of the Beheading of the Holy Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptizer of the Lord, John [August 29]; and after the feast, as had previously been his custom, he would give instruction there from the Holy Scripture, and some moral instruction: one evening in the Slavonic, the next in the Moldavian tongue. And he would remain in Sekoul for nine days, all the brethren, small and great, being free to come to him in his cell and inform him concerning all their needs of body and soul; and he gave repose to all.

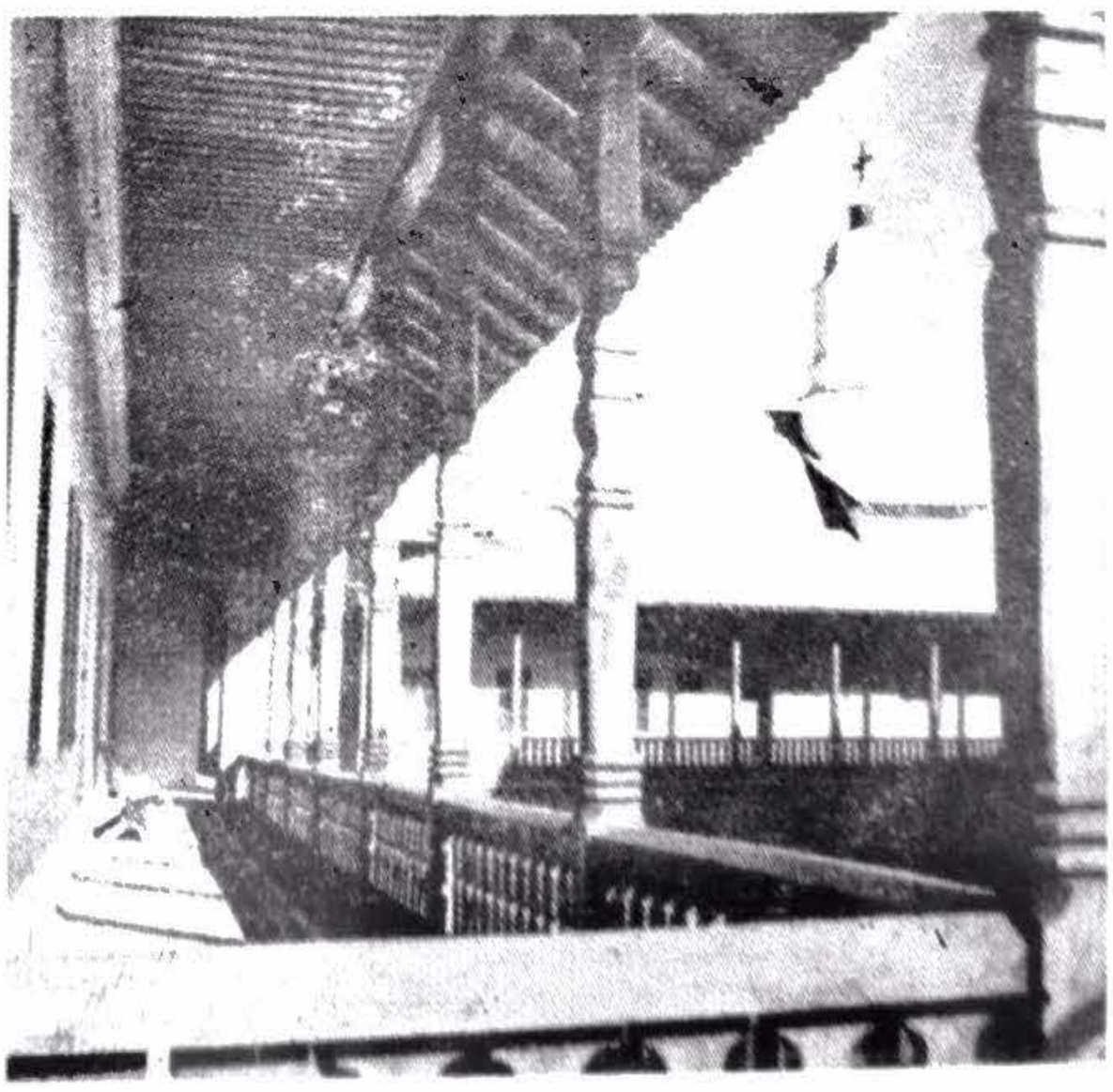
And he would speak to the brethren thus: "If any of you have any need of soul or body, and grieve and complain, but do not come to me and inform me of it, I will not have to give an answer before God for this grief of yours." And to those who were entirely unable to come to him from the infirmary, he gave a blessing through the spiritual Father Dositheus, and he gave abundant help for all the bodily needs of each and for the repose of all. The concern, mercy, and compassion for the sick of this spiritual Father Dositheus, and likewise his meekness and humility towards all, his quietness and love, surpassed everyone in the community. Often one saw the compassionate Father sitting the whole night with the very sick, sympathizing and sighing, and consoling the sick one with the hope either of yet recovering his health, or of saving his soul; and not a little comfort did he give such a one in the affliction of sickness.

After the celebration of the feast of Sekoul, our blessed Father would return to the monastery of Niamets, bearing in old age a two-fold labor: that is, concern and heartfelt pain over the salvation of the souls of all the brethren of both monasteries, and giving thanks for everything to the most merciful God.

In the monastery of Niamets a great church had been built in honor of the Ascension of the Lord. On this feast from of old there would be a numberless gathering of people of both sexes and every rank, both lords and peasants, rich and poor, who would come not only from Moldavia and Vlachia, but from other lands also, in order to venerate the wonderworking Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God. To all of them our Father, a second Abraham in hospitality, strove to give repose, as much as possible. Then for four days he would know no repose, having his doors open from morning to evening, and there was no hindrance to anyone, rich or poor, who wished to come in to him. All who came he greeted with love, thanking them for their labors undertaken in the journey, and promising them rewards of soul and body from the Lord and the Mother of God for their faith and love for Her. And

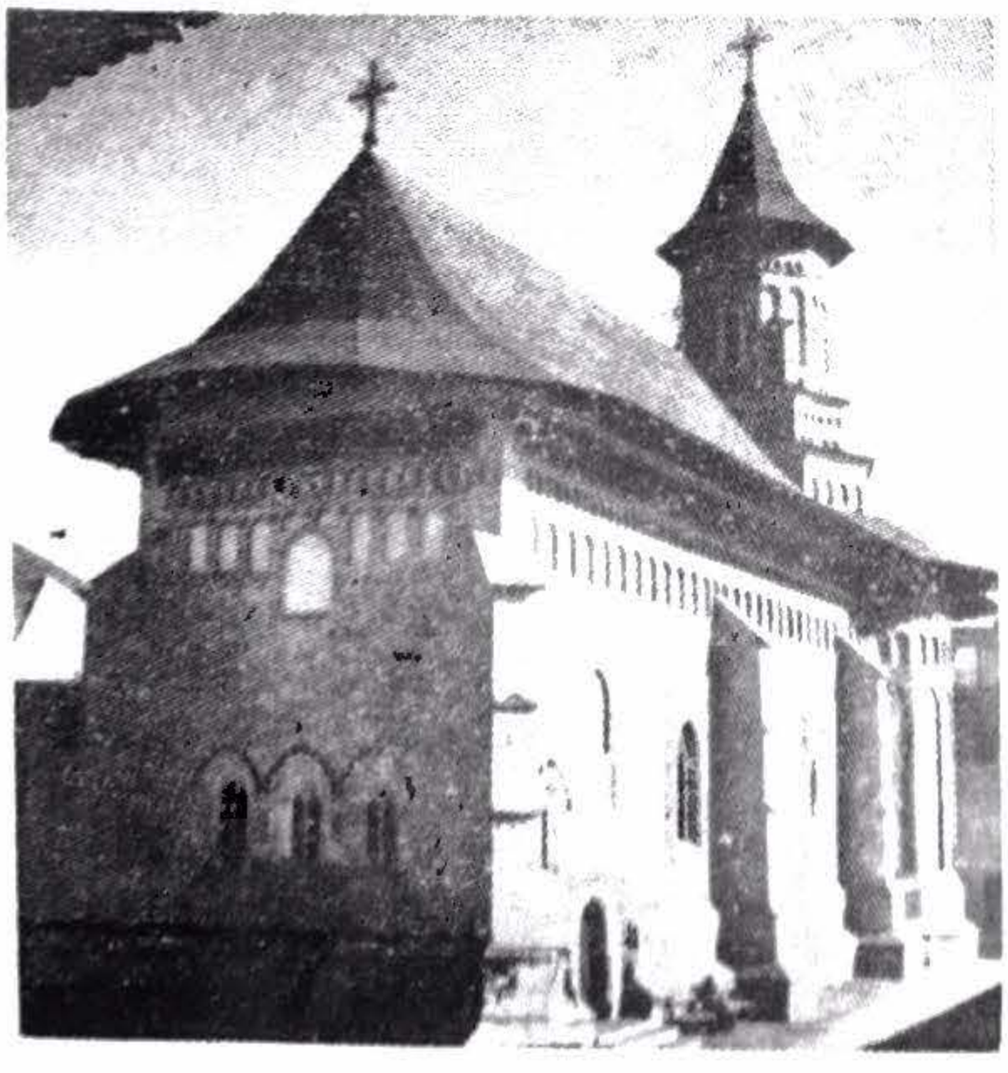
The Courtyard of Niamets Monastery, Showing the Ascension Cathedral

Towers of St. George's Church



Monks' Cells Overlooking the Inner Court

The Wonderworking Niamets Icon
of the Most Holy Mother of God



The Ascension Cathedral

The Cemetery Church

blessing them, he would send them to the guest-house, and to other cells which had been prepared for this.

And the following also did our divinely-wise and God-blessed Father do: When the feast had begun, he would appoint several of the brethren, those who were the most reverent in years and understanding, and who were filled with the fear of God, to watch over the infirm brethren, going about day and night so that no scandal might occur; and the brethren, knowing the will of their Father, guarded each other.

And when the feast had been celebrated, they sent up thanksgiving to Christ God and His Most Pure Mother, Who had vouchsafed them peacefully and successfully to celebrate the most radiant feast of the Lord.

The Monastic Life at Niamets*

ONE DISCIPLE of Elder Paisius, Blessed John the Fingerless, relates the following concerning the life at Niamets when he was there:

"Here I saw the great Elder and Archimandrite, Father Paisius, and his holy gray hairs, and his God-gathered great regiment. His disciples were already about a thousand in number. I fell to his feet and began to entreat him to accept me in his holy monastery, and number me among his flock. He accepted me with love, and having numbered me among the brethren, gave me an obedience, and entrusted me to a spiritual Father. He accepted everyone who came and desired to live with him, even though some of the elder monks grieved over this, for they endured a want of necessities; but he would always say to the brethren: 'One who comes to me I will not cast out; a brother has come, and with him prayer. God will send food for him as well.' And I, the sinner, began to live in his God-gathered flock and to take sweet enjoyment of his divinely-wise instructions, and to be consoled in beholding his splendid gray hairs.

"Eider Paisius instructed everyone, comforted everyone, chastised everyone with fatherly love — so that they would not violate the common life, would have perfect obedience and humility, and cut off their own will. He instilled in them that all should be submissive toward each other, and should revere each other with a prostration to the ground, that they should have a meek manner of walking, with the hands folded on the chest, the head bent down, the eyes cast down toward the ground, the heart directed upwards to God, and the mind in the ceaseless prayer of Jesus, and that in everyone there should be unhypocritical love. More than anything else he strove to sow

*This entire section is taken from Bishop Nikodim of Belgorod, *Russian Ascetics of the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Moscow, 1910, November volume, pp. 390-392.

and deepen in each one the divine seed, the activity of the heart, the mental and ceaseless prayer of Jesus.

"And the monastery of Niamets was then like a Paradise planted by God. All labored unto their Lord in oneness of mind and in love; there was a perfect common life and love in all, and in all there was as it were a single soul. Everyone performed his obedience with humility, without murmuring; everyone, looking at his shepherd, was consoled by beholding his face and by his converse, and by his holy gray hairs. He was to everyone an image and example by his life. But I, the sinner, was not vouchsafed to be tonsured by him a perfect monk, but only received from him the rank of riasophore, and lived with him only two years.

"But as humble and meek as he was, he was just as strict: for the least kind of unbefitting behavior he gave a strict chastisement. Once a certain novice was walking in the monastery, and he was swinging his arms unbefittingly and looking from side to side. The Elder was looking through the window and asked those nearby: 'Who is the spiritual Father of this novice?' He was told. And he called the spiritual Father and gave him a stern rebuke and said: 'Is this how you instruct your disciples? They are disorderly and scandalize the brethren. A monk must be in everything a monk: his walk meek, his hands on his chest, his eyes toward the ground, the head bent, giving a bow to everyone he meets — a bow to the ground if it be a hieromonk or a monk, and a simple bow if it be one like himself. You will say that he is not yet a monk; but he who lives in a monastery, whether he be tonsured or not, must observe the monastic way and take an example from his elders. For this I shall give a penance to both you and your disciple: to make prostrations for three days at trapeza [while the others are eating], so that the others also might learn not to act disorderly.'

"He also watched strictly that all make the sign of the Cross correctly. If anyone made the sign of the Cross on his brow improperly or carelessly, he would chastise him strictly and always say: 'If anyone make the sign of the Cross improperly, the demons rejoice at this waving of the hand.' He likewise kept a great good order in church. He always went about all the brethren himself to see that all stood in good order, with fear and trembling, and he watched all the bows, and especially those of the readers and those in the choir-places, so that not one bow should be omitted, whether at 'Holy God' or 'Come, let us worship' or at 'Alleluia.' And he kept the whole order and Typicon and melodies of the Holy Mountain of Athos. He strictly forbade the use of tobacco; and anyone who would not correct himself he banished from the monastery."

69. The Gradual Destruction of the Earlier Way, Which the Blessed One Foreknew

AND THUS we remained in the monastery of Niamets in peace bodily, but our spiritual life declined from the earlier peaceful life, beloved in God, with oneness of soul, which had existed at Dragomirna and Sekoul, which could not at all be recaptured. The reasons for this were the noise, over-abundance, disturbance, and the concern of each for himself, and therefore the abandonment of the reading of the Divine and Patristic writings and of heedfulness toward oneself. Our Blessed Father had wept bitterly over this before, and he continued to grieve over it to his very death, having foreseen that this would happen. These things he feared his whole life long, with pained heart, and he instructed all of us, little and great, to copy out and read the Patristic writings, so that we might be zealous for the ancient Fathers and thus keep to the narrow path of the Gospel and escape the present careless and hypocritical, world-loving monastic life.

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